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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006447

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: AK PARTY CONGRESS REAFFIRMS PM ERDOGAN'S
HOLD ON PARTY

(U) Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman. Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: PM Erdogan emerged from the ruling AK Party's Oct. 12 well-organized congress more in control of his party. In his acceptance speech, Erdogan focused primarily on AK's commitment to achieving a just, democratic system in Turkey. On Iraq, he reiterated the GOT's commitment to send troops as part of a stabilization force. On Cyprus, Erdogan asserted that Turkey cannot abandon the Annan Plan but said both sides have to be prepared to make concessions. Erdogan's changes to the party administration, our contacts say, bring in new faces who are closer to the PM, and perhaps more modern in their outlook. End summary.

No Contest: Erdogan Re-Elected AK Chairman

2. (C) At its first general convention on Oct. 12, which PolCouns attended, ruling AK Party re-elected PM Erdogan -- the only candidate for party chairman. Out of a total of 1463 party delegates, 1358 voted for Erdogan; the remainder, according to our contacts, were no-shows at the convention.

Atmospherics

3. (C) The AK Party convention was the most well-organized and scripted party congress we have seen recently, conveying a sense of discipline and order rarely present at Turkish political party gatherings. In contrast to the ultra-nationalist MHP's convention held on the same day (septel), for example, the proceedings began precisely on schedule and continued without a hitch. Security was tight but not intimidating. The press was cordoned off into a discreet area, whereas at other conventions they are often allowed to roam the floor.

4. (C) With a long list of foreign visitors in attendance and a live TV audience watching, AK was careful to project the image of a modern, democratic political party. Erdogan arrived without the usual accompaniment of handlers and sat with party founders and members of the cabinet -- in contrast to other parties' conventions where the chairman is often afforded a plush chair above his party subordinates. Men and women -- some headscarved, some not -- sat together in the audience.

Erdogan's Vision

5. (C) After being re-elected Chairman, Erdogan gave a one-hour, forty-minute speech, which focused primarily on the need for a new era of democracy in Turkey and only briefly touched on foreign policy. He laid out what he sees as an Anatolian vision of democracy that: 1) respects the rights of the individual in its interaction with the State; 2) is just and fair to everyone; and 3) allows Turkish citizens regardless of background to be themselves. While underscoring that AK is against the politics of polarization, Erdogan said that the path to full democratization will not be easy, but the GOT is determined to see it through. Erdogan, who seemed to hold the attention of the audience throughout the speech, repeatedly made use of religious allusions, presumably to appeal to the common Turk's sense of values, but he did not do so in a heavy-handed way.

6. (C) On foreign policy, Erdogan concentrated on Iraq, Cyprus, and a nebulous concept that Erdogan described as "strategic depth" -- although he did not elaborate on the latter. On Iraq, Erdogan stressed that the GOT is prepared to send troops to Iraq as part of a stabilization force. In

doing so, Erdogan focused on what AK sees as Turkey's duty and responsibility to participate (Comment: This part of Erdogan's speech drew some applause from party delegates, who largely remained silent through the rest of the speech. End Comment). On Cyprus, he said that the latest Annan plan cannot be rejected, nevertheless, both sides have to be prepared to make concessions.

Changes to Party Administration

17. (C) The delegates approved the list of 50 Central Decision Making and Administrative Board (MKYK) members submitted by Erdogan. Notably, Erdogan excluded Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul, former Deputy PM Ertugrul Yalcinbayir, and Parliament Human Rights committee MP Ersonmez Yarbay, a close Embassy contact. Erdogan increased the number of women on the MKYK to 10 -- up from five -- which Erdogan had promised prior to the convention (Note: seven of the 10 women do not wear headscarves. End Note). Erdogan also included the AK provincial chairmen from Ankara and Istanbul -- a nod to the party grassroots.

Comment

18. (C) AK's sober congress reaffirmed Erdogan's control over the party -- both its grassroots and its decision-making mechanisms. FM Gul, who we hear from contacts across the board is a political rival to the PM, sat stoically throughout the proceedings. On Erdogan's speech, we understand that "strategic depth" is a turn of phrase used by Ahmet Davutoglu -- an Erdogan advisor attached to the Prime Ministry -- to describe a multi-directional foreign policy that is less dependent on the U.S. and that seeks to enhance relations with the Islamic world, Russia, China, and to a degree with the EU. A journalist for Aksam newspaper with close ties to the AK inner circle argued that Erdogan has not fully digested the idea and would, in any case, not see it as a rejection of Turkey's partnership with the U.S.

19. (C) Our contacts -- including a leading national security analyst, the Aksam journalist, and AK Ankara chief and MKYK member Nurettin Akman -- confirm press reports that, in re-shaping the MKYK, Erdogan has begun the process of decreasing the influence of the Islamist Milli Gorus foundation, which they say Erdogan sees as exploiting religion for personal material gain. In doing so, they say Erdogan is attempting to bring in a more modern, forward-thinking, and responsive cast that is closer to the PM and the AK Party decision-making inner circle. The Aksam journalist argued that leaving Gonul off the MKYK will actually strengthen his position as a Minister, because Gonul will no longer have to devote his energy to party business. Akman told poloff Oct. 14 that Gonul simply did not have enough time to devote to party affairs. Yalcinbayir is considered a chronic naysayer by AK insiders. Meanwhile, Yarbay -- a thoughtful observer -- may have dug his own grave recently by criticizing Erdogan for authoritarian tendencies, a useful warning but one made too bluntly in the press, our contacts say.

EDELMAN